

CLIENT ALERT

DELAYS IN THE COURT SYSTEM AND SHERIFF'S OFFICES

Unless you have avoided looking at your phone, your laptop, TV and newspapers, you are aware of the tremendous disruption that the corona virus (COVID-19) outbreak has caused in the lives of all of us in Southern California, as well as the rest of the State and the Nation. The Court system and related services, such as the sheriff's offices and recorder's office, are no exception.

As of this morning, courts in Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino and San Diego Counties have each established new rules and procedures to minimize the number of people in the courthouses in an effort to help control the spread of the virus within the various communities. These new rules and procedures include but are not limited to postponing non-priority trials, requiring that most civil appearances be conducted via audio video call-in software, encouraging counsel to file documents via on-line procedures and reducing the number of jurors summoned to the courthouse. These measures, while clearly necessary, will seriously impact how and to what extent new and existing court cases are heard and processed. The counties listed above are the counties we have heard from so far today. We fully expect all courts in California to implement their own new rules and procedures in response to the virus as the week progresses.

For now, we are being told that priority unlawful detainer cases will be processed as usual, but as events unfold almost hourly, that may change. Regular civil actions will likely be postponed for the next 30 days and likely well beyond that if there are increasing signs of infection in the general population.

Attorneys and the general public are being advised to avoid courthouses and we expect that staff at both the courts and sheriffs departments will be reduced. It's not beyond the realm of possibility that, if the crisis becomes much more severe, the courts may actually shut down entirely for some period of time. While it is not planned at the moment, a week ago none of us would have expected the entire sports world as well as restaurants, bars and movie theaters to shut down.

For now, please expect all cases to move much more slowly. As we are advised of additional changes in the court system and/or if the State Legislature takes action that affects how we can pursue certain cases, we will send out further alerts.

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